



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 11, 1997

CONTACT: Maureen Cragin
Ryan Vaart
(202) 225-2539

OPENING REMARKS OF FLOYD SPENCE

FULL COMMITTEE MARK-UP OF H.R. 1119, THE FY 1998 DEFENSE

AUTHORIZATION BILL

Wednesday, June 11, 1997

We have a lot to work through today, so I will try to set a good example by keeping my remarks brief.

Today the committee will mark-up two major bills, H.R. 1119, the FY 1998 Defense Authorization Bill and H.R. 1778, the Defense Reform Act of 1997. We will start with the Defense Reform Act which, as my colleagues know, was introduced last week by myself and Mr. Dellums. The bill is the product of a lot of hard work by members on both sides of the aisle and certainly by the staff. It may be a comment on the times, but I have spent as much time on this reform bill over the past month as I have on the defense authorization bill.

Assuming the support of a majority of my colleagues here today, my plan would be to move through the markup of the Defense Reform Act as expeditiously as possible this morning. Having reported the bill, the committee would be in a strong position to take it to the Rules committee in amendment form for consideration when the House takes up the defense authorization bill in a few weeks.

Turning to H.R. 1119, the defense authorization bill itself is the product of many months of hard work on the part of all of my colleagues. We received the President's budget in early February and have conducted more than 50 hearings in the past several months. The bill is consistent with the Budget Agreement and the FY 1998 budget resolution, which the House adopted last week. It adds approximately \$2.6 billion to the President's budget, which is a far cry from the \$12 billion we were adding to the President's budget at this time last year. On the positive side, at least the President does not oppose extra funding for defense this year.

As I have said before, while the Budget Agreement may be a step forward on behalf of our economic security, I am not so sure the same can be said for our national security. The defense numbers in the Budget Agreement, and now in the budget resolution, fall more than \$60 billion short of even keeping pace with inflation over the next five years. After thirteen consecutive years of real decline in defense spending, and in view of the serious quality of life, readiness and modernization shortfalls afflicting all of the services, successfully carrying out our Constitutional responsibility to raise and maintain a military is going to be exceedingly difficult. While we will continue trying to revitalize our military, what we are really left having to do is trying to mitigate and manage a mounting level of military and strategic risk.

As in the past, the committee's efforts continue to focus on improving quality of life, ensuring readiness, modernizing aging equipment and, of course, reforming the Pentagon. This focus is bipartisan and it permeates the work of the subcommittees and panels. As such, let me first thank the gentleman from California, the committee's distinguished Ranking Member, for his dedication to this important process and for his professional and workman-like attitude on all issues.

Let me also thank each of the subcommittee and panel Chairmen and Ranking Members for their hard work over these past months. You have all covered a lot of ground in a short period of time. It is fairly easy for me to establish a schedule and to set parameters. It is much harder to actually follow through, yet that is what each subcommittee and panel has done.

Before recognizing Mr. Dellums, I would like to make several administrative announcements. First, it is my intention to finish our two markups today or tonight, however long it takes. Under the best of circumstances, today will be a long day. The committee will address some volatile issues, and I suspect that emotions will run high at times. Let me therefore remind all members to keep the debate substantive and not personal.

While debate is central to the democratic process, I would still remind members that they are on the wrong side of the Hill if they want to filibuster. For the good of all, the Chair plans to keep the day moving along. But to make this work, I will need all member's cooperation.

In addition, due to the likelihood of record votes on the Floor as well as in here, I cannot overemphasize the importance of promptly returning to the markup following Floor votes, the lunch break or any unavoidable absences. We cannot proceed without a quorum being present. And frankly, no issue ought to be decided based on how many members are, or are not, in the room to vote.

Finally, in order to keep this process moving along, I have arranged to have lunch provided to the Members in the anteroom in a few hours. At the appropriate point, I will suspend the markup for 30-40 minutes to allow members to eat. But we will promptly reconvene and continue with the markup.